To Joe,
Love Boogie

BLACKHAWKS

(THE CHILDREN SAD)

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JOE = JAKE
TONY = CARLO

Dedication

It would be wrong for me to say that all parents abused and neglected their children, in the place where I grew up. Some were kind, loving and good. So many were not. Time has not and may not ever change the terrible things that parents do to their children. For as long as we have memories, the pain will exist.

Millions of children everywhere on earth suffer each day. God help them all.

This book was written for all the children who grow up in pain. Unloved and abused.

To Tony and Andy, my friends, who suffered so much. May they smile down at us all.

B. Rendash

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"Seven Rolling Heads"

Maybe living on Rodney Street had something to do with all that was going on at this particular time, but what was about to happen had terrified all of us. What made the old man so crazed at times was something none of us kids could figure out because we were so young.

Many nights he would come home totally zonked and would start yelling and beating on my mother. After taking everything out on her, he always passed out on the floor. And we all would go through his pockets looking for whatever money was left, so we could get food to eat. We were so scared we laughed. It was like we were a group of vultures waiting for our share of the kill.

One summer morning we found ourselves hanging upside down on the porch. Thinking the old man was playing some kind of game. Six kids tied seperately by the feet, dangling there for over an hour. Listening to our parents arguing over whatever it was that day. The blood flowing to our heads, and we were screaming loud enough so that some of the neighbors could hear. my father walked out onto the porch with this long sword he had gotten from the war. He was swinging it around as though he knew exactly how to use it. Looking at him upside down and terrified, he turned away from us and said in his deep frightening voice "There are going to be Seven Rolling Heads today!

At that moment we were like fish out of water trying desperately to get back in and escape. He meant it ! My mother was hysterical and she put herself between him and us and started screaming. From out of nowhere a small fat man appeared on the porch and knocked my father down. He grabbed the sword and and threw it off the porch grabbing the old man and pushing him into the house. My mother untied us one by one and quickly lead us to a neighbors house. Still trembling she explained to the neighbor what had just happened. She asked if she could stay there until he left the house. If it hadn't been for that man, I wouldn't be writing this story. I've never seen him again to this day.

That summer was wild to say the least and it is implanted in my mind forever. One day I was alone in the street with a handful of .22 bullets, and a good sized rock in the other. I was five. I had seen other kids pounding on these things before,I somehow got a hold of some and decided I too would like to make some noise. After pounding nearly all of them in the street, a car was coming up fast. I had to jump to the side before I got hit. The man driving the jeep was approaching like a race car driver, and had no intentions of stopping! It was my father! I ran into the house and told

my mother who I'd just seen andshe quickley called us together and told us to hide under the beds. We did and she locked all the windows and doors. She told us not to make a sound. A couple of hours passed and we all got up and huddled next to my mother. She told us not to worry and said that we would be safe and that we were moving to another part of town in a few days. Life on Rodney Street was about to come to an end.

Leaving Rodney Street didn't mean much to us except that my mother and us kids did have a few good friends there. It was hard saying goodbye to them. That particular area , like most of the city is surrounded with three decker homes. Everywhere you looked they were there. Big and ugly and fullof large families. I had learned alot there. Just in those few five years. I learned how to steal, how to play with matches, and how to cry. One day my younger sister and I decided after watching a western on T.V. thatwe were going to make a camp fire, just like the Cowboys did. We dug a small hole and put some rocks around it and collected some paper and twigs. Stuffing them together, only guessing really what to do next. Nobody ever told us about matches. I can't really say whose idea it was, but the price paid was very high.

Stricking that book of matches seemed so hard for my little fingers. I must have gone through fifteen matches before finally getting one to stay lit. My sisterand I were really pleased. Just a few minutes later, I felt a horrible pain on my lower left leg. I had gotten too close to the fire and my pants were burning up. I panicked ! Not knowing what to do, I started running and jumping around in circles. Using my hands to try and put out the fire. My hands quickly blistered, my leg was cooked almost well done. My sister was only three and she sure didn't know what to do. I kept screaming and told her to go get our mother.

A few minutes later she came out back behind the house and tore my clothes off. She wrapped me in a blanket. The next thing I knew I was in the hospital with needles in my arms and bandages all over my leg and hands. My three year old sister saved my life. I spent the next three and a half months in the hospital recovering from the burns I had recieved. It was nice having all that attention payed to me . But the scars it left sickened anyone who saw them. Especially me. It was years before I touched any matches again.

Not long after learning about fire, my folks got a divorce. My father must have figured seven kids for this women was enough, and that it was time to find another. Extra marital relationships was nothing new to him. It was the major reason for his departure, other than not knowing what love was.

The Children Sad

Dad left Mom and
Mom left Dad
And it all left
the children sad

Seven children
Bam, Bam, Bam
he really thought he was a man

Well years went by
and we all grew
without a father
we all knew

But Ma held on
cause she was strong
she knew right where
her love belonged

And now I look
   inside my soul
My children will not
   see me go

Cause Dad left Mom
and Mom left Dad
and it all left
the children sad

Great Brook Valley

A.K.A. Sin Valley, A.K.A. The Zoo

Anyone else would probably thought it was a step up, moving across town to this newly built housing project. But being realistic, it was about ten steps down. We'd never seen so much brick. I guess the Federal Goverment thought it was doing it's Veterans a favor, when they built it. They probably meant well but, as it turned out most of the residents were very poor. On welfare and unhappy. The City Fathers surely felt this was a perfect place, to place it's human trash. After all, it was a good distance away from the upper classes. If anybody ever needed a good laugh, all they had to do was take a Sunday drive thru G.B.V. and see the animals living in their natural habitat.

It didn't take long to fit in with the rest of the people there in the zoo. We were all the same. Equally sad, equally hungry, and equally scared to death. We were like any new comer entering another world. People have always been afraid of anything or anyone stranger to them. At first we hid from the others coming out only because curiousity overwhelmed us. Everytime we thought it was safe, we did a little exploring and mingled with the masses. Thank God the Sun was there for everyone to share. So was the darkness.

School was coming up soon and the anxiety of going to a new [redacted] room was setting in fast. Meeting anyone and doing anything new is always difficult for someone who is extremely shy. I was . Because there was a lack of transportation in the projects. Many people relied on solicitors to come around and furnish articles of clothing or whatever one might be selling. Of course there was the usual Milkman and Baker. The best bet of all, the Storebus. The Storebus was probably the only fair deal anyone could get at that time. The owner converted an old city bus into a store on wheels, which provided folks a means of going shopping just by stepping out your door. The prices were basic and the service was respectable. Most people would recall the others as "Bill Collectors" but I refer to them as "Blood Suckers". One in particular was this middle aged Jewish man worked out of his ststion wagon. Selling new clothing but had very poor tailoring. The buttons fell off, zippers didn't work and they ripped easily. He'd sell them on credit and charge double what you'd pay in the store.

My mother(like others) couldn't afford to go to a regular store and buy new clothing, for seven kids. So she got sucked in to buying this trash. Although the amount of money for down payment was low, it took almost a year to pay for attire that should only take a couple of months. Some of these Blood Suckers took their pay in trade. If a mother didn't have her money, an act of sex was sometimes used. Although there were many reasons for G. B.V.'s Sin Valley nickname. This was one of the

major. There are those who would do just about anything to feed and cloth their children. There were those who did NOTHING!

The Blackhawks
(Initiation)

The first day of school finally came and my mother had to literally throw us out of the house, to get us to go. George and Albert, my two older brothers yelled at me for stopping too much on the way to school. George, who we nicknamed the KING was my idol. He was everything I thought I wanted to be. The King was handsome, brave, intelligent and demanding. He should have been a real one. Now Albert, he was very different. Oh, he was handsome, clever, sneaky and aggressive. But, he had a heart. We nicknamed him the Rodent. Only because he resembled a rat. Chewed his nails like a man using a jackhammer.

The both of them were always guiding me in the right direction. The King was eight. The Rodent was seven. Little men. I could always count on them for wisdom. The King wasn't the most patient ruler I'd been blessed with. He would yell at times, but when he meant business , he meant business. I caught up with them only after earning a few jolts to the head from his Highness. The Rodent got his share in too.

Eventually, reminding myself of my shyness, I fell behind once again. I slowly started up the school path, approaching a couple of kids I got closer to them. Not knowing who they were, I started listening to what they were saying. "I'm gonna kill that fuckin' Benny:! A kid with a strange voice said, I almost shit my pants. It only took those few words to turn me right around, and I headed back home. A few hundred yards later I said to myself, how can this kid say he's going to kill me when he doesn't even know me? Standing there shaking, I had to decide quickly what to do. Or otherwise I would be late this first day of school. I chose to be late. I headed back up towards the school, and hid in the brush, close to the school yard. I didn't know where my brothers were, at this time so I didn't come out of the bushes until the last bell rang and all the kids went into the building.

The Principal questioned my tardiness, and then brought me to my new class. I felt like a massive pimple on an otherwise clear face. The teacher was incredibly beautiful and very soft spoken. It was instant love. For me anyway. After the brief introduction, she sat me down at my desk and indocrinated us all. My eyes searched the room, and as I was about to write my name on a card, I looked to my immediate left there he was! The kid who said he was going to kill Benny. My pants were getting wet and you could have sworn we were having an earthquake. My desk was shaking as if it were possessed. What will I do now?

I said to myself, wishing it were a dream. Slowly I was distracted by other things going on. I didn't think about it until recess came along.

I really didn't want to go outside, but my teacher held my hand and reassured me that I would be okay. She was so beautiful. I would have followed her anywhere. Having no choice, but to join the others. I tried finding my brothers. They were only interested in playing marbles with a few other kids. I found my own game, and decided to spend recess there. Right when I was about to win a few punas, I heard the kid with the strange voice behind me say "Hurry up and shoot, I want to play you before the bell rings. I missed the shot and lost my prized punas. All the kids laughed at me. I got mad as hell. Since I couldn't do anything about it I just stepped away and waited. A minute later the kid came up to me placing his massive hand on my shoulder, telling me I kicked my foot too hard. That with a little practice I'd probably beat most of the kids in marbles.

I hadn't really looked at him close up before this. At least I didn't notice his features. He was a tough looking person with muscles popping out of his clothes. He kept sniffling with his nose and had trouble speaking clear. My name is Carlo, What's yours? Stuttering I said, Ben Ben Benny. I'm after a kid named Benny, he said after making a mean looking face. Don't worry, your not him. I sweated all morning for nothing. Carlo and I talked some more. We went inside when the bell rang. What a relief that was! The first day of school seemed endless. The final bell rang and everyone lined up and got ready to leave. Carlo and I left together.

His nose was forever running. I didn't say anything at the time. It seemed all the other kids were snickering behind his back, and laughing at him. He knew . Most of the kids stayed their distance from him. He was known to become very aggressive. Physically fighting was nothing knew to him. Like me, Carlo had a good size family too. Two older brothers, three younger and two beautiful sisters. If he wasn't battling in his house, it was anywhere outside. He didn't want to, he had to.

Carlo's speech was distorted because of a birth defect. Born with a hole in the roof of his mouth, he always had problems speaking. The voice would travelthrough his throat and nose at the same time. This caused his nose to run constantly. Children can be cruel to others. When their young, not realizing the damage it would cause. They never let up on him. Making him so defensive. His looks alone would start you shakin'. He was a leader, a teacher, a boy. Whose only friend was his reputation. We were getting along really well. After a couple of days Carlo told me about his gang."The BlackHawks". All boys, whose age was no higher than Ten. I'd heard about them, but didn't know who they were. He said I could be one, If I passed the initiation. There was no thinking about it. Five years old and in the BlackHawks.

Carlo's brother was the same age as the King. Both eight. I had to see him before I was let in. The King and Rodent had been seen many times with Jake, Carlo's brother. My brothers were on their way also. They hadn't even mentioned it to me. Jake, Carlo, Rodent, the King, myself and a few other kids went down to Carlo's cellar. They pulled up chairs sitting there waiting. It was quiet. Jake began speaking. "This is where we'll meet to decide on what we're going to do after school. You guys listen to me and we'll make out alright. A couple of other guys are coming over. Craig and Scott. The Hampton brothers. I had played against Scott many times in marbles, and he was really good.

He owned Tacoma Street. It was his territory. It was to be mine, also. Craig and Scott came down the stairs in two jumps. Swings open the door and began pacing the room. Hi Jake, Carlo. Jake looked at me and said, "I know you", your the Rabbi. The one that goes to church. What's a Rabbi? I said and he began laughing. Everyone looked at me and laughed. I did too. I thought everybody went to church. Jake said we'll call you Rabbi because you look religious. I didn't care.

First a King, then a Rodent and now a Rabbi. We all started talking and playing some cards for a while. My eyes roamed the room looking at what was there. Five caged in rooms with Bicycles, tools, weights, chairs and an old desk. It was swept up and neat. All the cellars were the same. The Housing Authority didn't want kids in the cellars, period. They lost. Technically, it was theirs. Demandingly it was Jake and Carlo's. Carlo got up and said "Rabbi's going to be a BlackHawk. All of us must go through an initiation before we're accepted. It's that time.

Jake told me to place myself spread eagle against the caged wall. He then told Rodent to tie my wrists to the wire. Do his feet too! Everybody watched and participated. It was pink belly time. They all took a turn, slapping my bare stomach. A hundred times each. Carlo stuck a small rag in my mouth and pushed it in too far. I couldn't breath. I kept moving my body wildly. I tried desperately to spit the rag out. I couldn't. Jake was looking right in my eyes. I started crying about to fade. Jake pulled the rag out and let me free. I fell into a chair. Shocked. I almost died. Jake saved my life. I passed. King, Rodent and I had made it. It was nine P.M. when we left the cellar. We went home and watched t.v. for a minute, and then I went upstairs. We all looked at our stomachs and smiled. The King talked about the BlackHawks for awhile, after going to bed. We all slept together. Or tried. There was much more to come. Craig had said, we'll meet in the cellar before we go to school in the morning. I grabbed my marbles the next morning and waited for the King to get his share of the milk. We never had enough to go around. If lucky, we all had something. Always fought over the food. But now we were BlackHawks and soon hurried to the cellar. Everyone was there. Jake was eating some toast while Carlo wiped the snart from his nose, onto his pants. Scott got up and said, let's go!.

Jake and Carlo walked out first(always). Craig and Scott followed and then the rest of us. We stood outside facing a large Boiler building in front of Jake's house. Carlo looked to the ground and grabbed some rocks. He began whipping them at the windows of the building. They penertrated nice. Let's do it like a machine gun. Everybody together. We shattered a dozen windows. Some man yelled out a window nearby and we scattered. A minute later we were on our way to school.

We took the swamp route. It was great! Sucker fish, crayfish, Bull frogs, smaller frogs, snakes. You name it, it was there. We stopped there for awhile. Rolling up our pants and going in with our shoes. Bull frogs everywhere. We'd sneak up behind them and pull them out of the water. Holding them tightly, swinging them loosely. Most of the time we'd let them go. That day we went to the other side of the swamp, and took a couple of smaller frogs with us.

Scott had a couple firecrackers and some string. Jake tied a frog by his feet, and hung him on a branch. He gave him a good push and watched hin swing, back and forth. Scott placed a firecracker in the frog's mouth. Lighting it, he gave another push. Boom, the frog was obliviated. We cracked up! We did a couple more and then headed up the hill. All of us played marbles and chased each other before the bell rang. I couldn't wait to get out of school that day.

One of the kids in my class had brought in a little plastic globe on a stand. A pencil sharpener. All the kids liked it , and he was eating it up. Carlo, looked at me and said, that's nothing!, we'll get our own after school. The bell finally rang. The BlackHawks got together at the bottom of the hill. Let's go up to WoolWorth's, said Carlo. I gotta get a few things. Who's going? We all are! said Jake. Stay together. I'd never gone to Lincoln Plaza before. So I was anxious to move on. The King always walked in front with Jake. Craig and Scott were there too. Carlo, myself, Rodent and a couple others followed close behind. We didn't waste any time. We took the short cuts. All the way up Chino Ave. to Lincoln Street. Then came Lincoln Plaza. It's so huge.

Lots of different stores for us to go to, and see what we might take. I learned about stealing even before I moved to the Zoo. Carlo said earlier in school that he was going to get his own globe. The other guys went into White's (department store) to ride the escalator up and down. Carlo and I went into WoolWorth's. We looked at just about everything, trying to decide what to take. Both of us watching anything that moved. Carlo unbuttoned his shirt. I was lookout. He grabbed every globe they had. After pretending to be"just looking". We walked out out of the store and headed for White's. I

went in and had my share of riding. I forgot about Carlo waiting outside. After quickly finding the others, we all met and headed home. Jake and Scott were laughing loudly up ahead. Carlo reached into his shirt and pulled out one of the globes. Here Rabbi, I give you the world! Take it, you deserve it. That made my day. Carlo walked with me, talking about tomorrow, and what he was planning. We went the same route. When we got back Carlo stopped down the cellar to put his globes away. The rest of the evening we spent wrestlingand talking. Under the Maple tree, next to Craig and Scott's house.

This became our out, door office. Decisions were being made while cars rode by and motorcycles roared. All of us, lying there looking at the stars until we almost fell asleep. Craig stood up and said he was going in. King and Rodent called to me. I didn't like the dark. That next morning after getting punched in the head for drinking the last of the milk. King led the way to the cellar. Carlo was all smiles. Jake was standing there spinning a globe. Everyone couldn't wait for school that morning. Yesterday a kid in our class had the only globe. The teacher had been out in the hall speaking to another teacher. She sat immediately, reading something in her hand. A couple of minutes she looked up and on every desk there was a globe. Carlo gave all the class a globe each. The teacher smiled and began circling the room. We sat stiff. She scratched her head and went to the chalkboard. Every time Carlo would turn around, every kid would smile with glee. Carlo was a temporary hero. I was his friend. I won Twelve punas during recess that day. I gave some to Carlo. When school got out we stuck around. Craig said he wanted to swing on the flag pole and everyone followed.

All of us loved this. BlackHawks love to fly. We'd all taken turns swinging on the rope. Carlo asked if I'd like to be pulled up on the pole. I wasn't afraid of heights. I was scared. They made a circle. Jake and Carlo started to pulling me up the pole. I held on tight and closed my eyes. They kept pulling until I was about thirty feet. I yelled down to them to let me come down. They let go of the rope and I fell to the ground. I only felt a quick pain to my back. Nobody said anything except a kid who was laughing at me by the driveway. I got up and started hitting him without mercy. He ran. They all just looked at me and started to leave.

Our initiation wasn't over. Craig, Scott and Jake said we needed some money. Craig said it was time to do upper Lincoln Street. The BlackHawks adventured the way. Rodent knawing on his nails, Carlo wiping his nose with his arm and hand. Jake and the King both were trying to see who could spit the furthist. Scott was helping me with the details. We passed by Holland Rink and skipped a few rocks over the water. State Mutual Life Assurance Co. was across the street. It was the largest building I'd ever seen. They had signs on the lawn stating to "Keep Off The Grass". No way. This was good soft grass. We ran all over it barefoot. They had the flags flying from every state. We ran and looked at all of them. The wind was nice. All the flags waved together.

Craig said it was time to move on . I was out of breath.

When we reached Norgren Funeral Home Craig, Scott and Jake said that at least three stores had some money. Carlo told me to look for the "Jimmy Fund" cannister, and put it inside my pants and walk out. I went in with Rodent. He watched and whisoered to me to do it. I grabbed the can and walked out. King got two. With help from Carlo. Jake Scott and Craig waitedfor us on GreenHill Parkway. I'd known that area slightly. Well enough to find the others. GreenHill Park was very familiar. We all knew this place. Green was all you'd see. Craig said to wait until we get back to the cellar, before we counted the change.

Carlo passed out some candy he grabbed while at the counter. We got almost Twenty dollars. Jake was not only a leader but, assigned himself treasurer. Money never meant much to me. So I really didn't care what I recieved. It's a good thing too because our treasurer wasn't a great mathemetition. His share stood taller. One for me, two for Jake, one for Carlo, two for Jake, one for . . . . I didn't know what I was going to do with mine. Jake still had his first dime. I could tell by the look on his face that he liked holding it. Counting it over and over. Of course the King was almost the same. But he went into the corner turning his head every few seconds counting the coins. Rodent wanted to gamble it away. Tossing with Scott. To see who gets closer to the wall. Craig sat there listening to W.O.R.C. 1310. Everyone was dancing like fools and laughing. The night dragged on.

There was talk about starting our own grocery store. We decided my cellar was a good place. Jake and Craig said that we needed to build up supplies, not sell. Only the BlackHawks will know. I don't know about you guys, but I'm tired of being hungry. The Plaza has plenty of food. We'll bring some home too."Take only what you can carry" Jake went on. Carlo and Scott were writing a list. The rest of us decided to go home. When King, Rodent and myself got home we remembered we hadn't eaten since lunch. Rodent said he would make us supper. There wasn't anything there. Tomorrow wouldn't come soon enough for us. I overheard my mother crying in her room.

I walked by quickly, said Hi Ma, then ran upstairs. I drank a couple handfuls of water. To put something in my stomach. Rodent and the King started fighting over what stores to get the food. King George said he wanted to get some meats and bread. Rodent said that he was thinking about the lobsters up at the First National. How nice it would be to get Ma a lobster. I layed in my bed slowly falling to sleep. It was Saturday now. We got up and headed right out the door. "Where are you kids going"? ma said. Echoed Bev, my older sister. Playing! answred King. Playing robbers he mumbled, as we headed for Tacoma Street. The BlackHawks met at the tree. Carlo was hanging from a branch swinging nervously, because Scott was about to grab his legs. Carlo was too strong for Scott. He held on til Scott gave up. Craig began speaking. O.K. lets get going. We made the Plaza in fifteen minutes. Dogs along the way help motivate us all. Jake picked up a stick and hit a few. These dogs were going to bite if he hadn't.

There was plenty of rocks on Chino Ave. We all grabbed some and the dogs got the message. We screwed around on the wooded posts in front of White's. Carlo wanted me to go with him. Rodent and Scott went to First National. The King left with Craig to hit Sam's Bakery. Carlo and I went into White's. Down the elevator to the mens room. Carlo told me to stay by the door and watched for anyone coming. He'd done this before. Quickly opening lockers with accurate hands, he grabbed a couple wallets and closed them up. While we were there we decided to use the facilities and inscribe our name on the door. Carlo washed his hands and face annd said, "lets go". We sat on the banking across from White's. Carlo started laughing because Rodent was running through the parking lot with a lobster in each hand. He threw them on the ground. He was out of breath. Where's Scott? Carlo asked. I don't know replied Rodent. Scott appeared a minute later, with some bologna, cheeseand a jar of mustard. We sat waiting . Craig and his majesty went around the side of White's. They both looked as if they'ed saw a ghost. Puffing away the King threw a long loaf of pumpernickle bread at me. Between them both they got five loaves. They said they dropped two because a man was coming out back.

We left the Plaza taking a short cut through Lincoln Country Club. Craig said, the worse golfers in the world play here. You'll see next summer. I loved the golf course. Lots of grass and plenty of open space. We had to stay on the path because the golf course boundries ended and it was new terrain. It was like going through a jungle. Skunk cabbage everywhere, with it's nasty small. Chipmunks looking under leaves, while birds singing away. We finally made it out of the jungle.

Jake said we'd better sneak around the back of the building. Rodent Carlo opened the door and turned the light on. Let's eat! he yelled. Jake told everyone to put everything on the table. Go upstairs and get a knife Rabbi! King said to me. Fuck you King. I told him to get it himself. He must have slapped me in the head ten times. I still didn't move. Scott opened the musterd jar and used his finger to spread it. No knife, no sliced bread. Carlo began ripping it apart. Rodent took the lobsters upstairs and put them in the bathtub. My mother was at a neighbors house. Rodent came back down to the cellar and grabbed some cheese. The knawing was driving me crazy. I told him to chew like a human. Rodent picked up a chair and was about to throw it at me. I moved closer to Jake.

He was the one with the power. He protected the innocent. Rodent sat back down and continued his eating habits. All fed? Questioned Jake. Mmmmm replied the boys. Craig stood up and went to the back of the cellar. He came back with a stick and some twine. Let's go, shooting bows and arrows. Nobody else had what we needed for ours. Scott said he'd get some more twine from his house. I waited to see what he had in mind. We followed Jake to the brook below Constitution Ave. There were plenty of sticks to be found. Each of us made a bow. Craig assisted me with mine. Searching for good arrows was hard.They had to be a good length and almost straight.

We managed. Craig and Scott wrapped some straw around the tips of the sticks, making strange looking arrows. Scott took one of them and had Carlo light the straw end with a match. It lit quickly. Scott aimed his bow towards the dry grasslands across the brook. A shooting flame! The field caught on fire. We used the rest of them setting other spots ablaze. Some ended up on rocks aside the brook. Others entered the water. It was going wild about the time Craig said, "Let's get going". We broke the twine and tossed the bows into the bushes. By the way, Carlo lit my arrows. Mine seemed to love water.

We took turns carrying one another. Piggy back up New Vista Lane. Craid decided to spend some time at the tree. We were all muddy from the brook. We all sat there barefoot waiting for our sneakers to dry. Carlo pulled some cigarettes from his shirt and passed them around. About four puffs apiece and the BlackHawks layed there dazed. I remembered sneaking a cigar before having a butt. All that coughing still didn't connect.

We watched the sky darken, and listened to Jake tell a story. He liked scaring us. His stories were based on fact. He wouldn't lie, I thought. Later in the evening, Carlo told us about skunk hunting. I'd seen a few searching the garbage cans at night. When we first moved to the zoo. Craig, King and Jake walked over to the clothes line fence. Craig began pulling at one of the boards. It came loose and he banged the nails against the cement stairs in front of his house. Bending the nails into the board on the end. It was about five feet in length and very light. He swung it as though it were an ax. His Highness motioned for the rest of us to join in. As usual I needed some help. Rodent broke four of them before he got what he wanted.

The skunks are going to be out tonite because thay haven't picked up the garbage yet, Craig said. They'll be plenty. Jake and the King led led the way this time. I had know idea what we were up too. Carlo yelled, there's a fuckin skunk! Scott and Jake ran up to it forcing it into a cellar stairwell. Scott stepped down very slowly with his board in both hands. He began poking at it causing the skunk to move in circles. Rabbi, Rodent, throw yours like a sprer at it! Yelled Jake. We leaned over the railing and missed. The skunk started up the stairs in a panic. He was just about to reach the top when the King got him, right on the head. The rest of them began beating the skunk until it lay there motionless. The kill was complete. We were victors once again. Craig pulled the skunk by it's tail and slung it away from us. The smell was awful to say the least. And all over our clothes.

I thought about my father. He became a skunk. The moon was serious stuff. We followed it until the clouds covered it's view. I felt strange. Nobody was speaking. The tree was almost invisable because of the darkness. Scott and Carlo climbed up and hung there waiting to strike. Saturday night and sight seers were everywhere. I thought that we must be better thaan nothing.

Meanwhile cars passed the tree on Tacoma St. Jake told some jokes and we laughed, until we headed home. We went home when we wanted to. Ma never really was that strict against times. I guess she felt that the young in a jungle must grow fast, and learn faster. She said, "Don't care what you do as long as it ain't wrong. We never did tell her what we were up to. The Code. The BlackHawks tell nothing to nobody. To say she wasn't suspicious would be unfair. She was. But while we were out "Playing", she still had my sister Erica, brothers Ray and Mark to raise.

Her hands were so full she didn't watch the clock. She had nothing to worry about. Three of her sons kept out of her hair and into a gang. It wasn't hard lying to her. It was very hard to look at her. She knew. Probably everything! I don't remember many hugs. I remember what they were like. So warm and secure. I got one that night. We all did. Alice Rendash and family. She smiled as her seven children sat on the couch each sucking their thumbs.

Sunday, sunny and windy. Ma gave us our envolopes for church collection. "Behave boys and don't chew your gum in church". We won't Ma, bye. I liked church even though I couldn't understand what they were saying. When they kneeled, I kneeled. When they stood, I stood. Get the picture? The church had the words. "Jesus Must Be First Served" inscribed in stone. Observation was one of my specialties. Sitting in church you'd see people slapping their kids, then smile at the person sitting next to them. Even the Priest joined in. He came down from the alter a while back and stopped at one of the pews. A boy was still yapping away and the Reverand angrily smacked the back of his head. While screaming like an umpire. I always stayed way back. Ready to run.

Instead of placing our envelopes in we grabbed the ones that were in there. A quick two or three. Ma could only afford a nickle each. The church got their share.
All the priests had nice cars. The family found time for God, before moving to Sin Valley. The interest passed, like first love.

Grub's Market slowly became a BlackHawks stop-over. Grub was a Grub. Although the board of health inspector must have been blind. Grubs club sandwiches were still the best. This was our new church. People from the zoo had had a liking for this market. The King motioned us out of church, before the rest of the congregation filed out. Jake and the rest of the gang were waiting at Grub's. They hid on the roof, but we could still see them. Craig jumped down. Carlo, Scott and Jake followed. How was church? Scott asked. The King reached in his pocket and pulled out the envelopes. Carlo grabbed at them, slapping two to the ground. Jake put his hand out. After all, he was the treasurer!. Craig went to the front, pausing for Jake. The door swung open and in we went.

Jake went to the first isle on the left, while Craig went to the counter. To see Grub. That isle was stocked with cereal and some can goods

Just high enough so Grub couldn't see us. Jake picked up a Quaker Oatmeal box. He lifted the cover and spat. He passed it to Rodent and so on. The things like most of the products were covered with dust. We gathered by the register. Craig had been speaking to Grub while we blessed the market. Craig talked Grub into letting him slice some bologna, cheese and tomatoes. It's amazing he never sliced himself. Carlo looked at Craig and started towards the counter. Carlo knew that Grub had a hard time understanding him, when he spoke. Besides, Carlo unintentionally spat while he was speaking. Grub moved back, trying to find something to do. Rodent, Jake and the King started tossing vegetables cans. They avoided the open can of Campbell's tomatoe juice because of the amount of mold growing, on it. Grub got hot! He started yelling, changing seasons before our eyes. Craig meantime signaled me to come around the meat counter. He ripped off my coat, zippered it up turning the waist line and started throwing some club sandwiches in. Rodent and Carlo pretended to be fighting. I sneaked out with the food, while the others continued to anger Grub. Well, he erupted. They all came flying out. We crossed the street to the Jamesbury Factory. Sat a minute. While Jake went to the other store below Grub's.

Carlo said, before they were called the BlackHawks another name had been suggested. The K.K.K. Kozy Korner Kids. But it didn't fit. That's where Jake went to get the drinks. He brought back a bottle of Gingerale. Carlo passed out a club sandwich to each of us. After all, Grub had at least twenty five on display. I thought to myself about the empty refrigerator at home. Jake yelled out, "Thanks Grub!. We all laughed with bellies full.

Craig started walking. This time he headed towards the beginning of Tacoma Street. On the Lincoln Street side. Across the street from the zoo, is a place called the "Home Farm". There were no homes. No farm either. It was just a large chunk of wasted land. Where anyone could go if they wanted to. There was a large pond there which was fed by Great Brook Valley. The grasses surrounding the pond stood waist high, to most of us. This made snake catching all the more difficult. Jake and Scott guided us to the banking. We stood there counting the different kinds of bottles, cans, paper and everything else that polluted the pond.

Down to the right was a small man-made damn. It was actually a piss poor waterfall. A wall of cement. The water falling over it wasn't deep. An inch or so. Running and splashing across it got old fast. Carlo pointed out to a silo facing the zoo. The Randash's hadn't come upon this before. We'd always taken Chino Ave. back home. When we left the pond Jake said, this also was to be part of the initiation. All we had to do was climb the silo to the top. It stood there like a skyscraper. Clouds moving swiftly across it's top. I watched while Rodent climbed up the bars. "Don't look down". yelled Jake. Just keep climbing. Slowly up the bars he reached the top. He yelled, What a view!. Don't stand up there all day, it's Rabbi's turn, said Jake. Rodent seemed to take forever climbing down. He was still shaking. I said my private good-byes and began climbing. Not a sound. I looked down a few times. Whoah!. I knew now why fright rhymed with height. The view at the top was incredible. Trees were like blades of grass. The silo stood approximately sixty feet. Built from large blocks of stone. At the base layed a pile of broken stone and glass. I thought about air. It was time to descend. It seemed so hard to climb down. I was still in minor shock after touching earth.